

The Aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita: DCMA District West Reports

by Mr. Sam Rousso, Congressional and Public Affairs Advisor,
DCMA District West

The nation stood spellbound as the disasters that were Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita hit the Gulf Coast and devastated whole cities. Unfortunately, Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA) employees and contractors were included among those affected, but personnel from DCMA District West spearheaded Agency efforts to help their colleagues.

After Hurricane Katrina hit, a team was formed under the direction of Air Force Col. Wilma F. Slade, DCMA West chief of staff. One of the team's first tasks was to account for all DCMA employees in the affected areas. Initially, 80 of our coworkers and their families were unaccounted for in the immediate aftermath of Katrina. The affected contract management offices (CMOs) — DCMA Orlando, South Florida, Huntsville, Dallas and NASA Product Operations — had activated their emergency and Continuation of Operations plans. Before they evacuated, employees were briefed on procedures and given phone numbers or e-mail addresses to reestablish contact. It took more than two weeks, but eventually everyone was accounted for, some making contact using computers in public libraries.

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(Background) View of New Orleans, La., on Aug. 31, 2005, two days after Hurricane Katrina struck, causing damage to the Superdome sports arena. (Photo courtesy of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration/Department of Commerce)

In all, approximately 80 of our coworkers and their families were unaccounted for in the immediate aftermath of Katrina.

Another part of Col. Slade's team, under the leadership of Mr. Robert Chen, DCMA District West Headquarters, evaluated the state of the contractors in the affected areas. According to Mr. Chen, his team tracked the operational status of more than 700 contractors: "Less than 100 suffered significant damage that caused interruptions to their operations." He added that what interruptions there were did not pose a significant impact to any major Defense Department procurement.

DCMA Orlando and South Florida

According to Ms. Barbara Turner, DCMA Orlando's deputy commander, only seven contractors in her region were surveyed for damage after Katrina. One contractor, Solitron Devices of West Palm Beach, Fla., didn't suffer any damage, but one of its principal vendors, located in the New Orleans area, did. Mr. Nestor Paz, DCMA South Florida quality assurance representative, suffered significant damage to his roof, and his house sustained damage from flooding. According to Ms. Turner, "The situation was compounded by the fact that his wife underwent surgery at the same time, and he was about to deploy to Iraq." Despite all these challenges, Ms. Turner reports the Paz family is doing well.

All in all, DCMA South Florida stood down for a total of only two and a half days. Ms. Turner reports that several of the CMO's personnel have volunteered to assist the Federal



Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the Gulf Coast. "Having experienced these hardships themselves, our folks empathize with the folks in the area," she said.

DCMA Huntsville

DCMA Huntsville covers the geographic region of Western/Central Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi and the Florida Panhandle and thus had several operations teams affected. While all of DCMA Huntsville's employees were accounted for after the storm, it soon became clear that some of the contractors within the jurisdiction were affected. The storm hit Mississippi the hardest, and operations teams assigned to southern Alabama, west Tennessee and the Florida Panhandle worked to make contact with all contractors in those areas by phone. Communications in Mississippi were difficult even weeks after the storm; consequently, DCMA Huntsville commander, Army Col. Gary L. Bliss, decided to mobilize a team to assess the damage done to contractors in the most devastated areas. The joint team was headed by Army Reserve Maj. John Jacobi and included DCMA Huntsville civilians and U.S. Army and Air Force officers. A command post was set up in Jackson, Miss., at the Hampton Inn,

(Above) Hurricane Katrina on Aug. 28, 2005, at 11:45 a.m. EDT when the storm was a Category Five hurricane. (Photo courtesy of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration/Department of Commerce)

(Left) Army Reserve Maj. John Jacobi (foreground) with Army Reserve Maj. Rodney Davis, preparing for the first day's mission. Maj. Jacobi led a joint team of DCMA Huntsville civilians and U.S. Army and Air Force officers mobilized to assess the damage done to contractors in the most devastated areas. (Photo courtesy of DCMA Huntsville Katrina Assessment Team)





which very generously provided a suite, and five teams were deployed into the southern reaches of the state. Each team was assigned a sport utility vehicle and equipped with items such as meals ready to eat, bottled water, first-aid kits and emergency lights. One member of the team, a veteran of an Iraq deployment, remarked that he had never seen damage like this. The teams assessed the damage and operational capacity of their facilities and the abilities of the majority of their contractors. Pictures were taken of damage to the facilities, and personnel were interviewed to get a sense of operational difficulties. A few contractors' facilities were abandoned, destroyed or unreachable.

DCMA Dallas

DCMA Dallas and DCMA NASA Product Operations suffered the most hurricane-related damage. At DCMA Dallas' New Orleans office, some coworkers lost homes and belongings. Two were able to depart prior to the hurricane's arrival, but one spent a harrowing four days before being rescued by a helicopter off her roof. Two of the employees were evacuated to Atlanta, the other to Memphis, Tenn. The Memphis evacuee has moved to Huntsville, Ala., and is now working for that CMO.

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Two weeks after Hurricane Katrina struck, DCMA Dallas' Houston office had to be evacuated due to Hurricane Rita. While no extensive damage occurred in the greater Houston area, there was significant damage inflicted on a number of defense contractors in southeast Texas and southwestern Louisiana.

DCMA NASA Product Operations

Ms. Susan Jackson, DCMA NASA Product Operations deputy commander, had two locations in her operational area affected by the hurricane — the Michoud Assembly Facility, which is just east of the City of New Orleans, and the Stennis Space Center, which is about 60 miles further east, across the Mississippi border. "All of the contractors at Stennis (where we support the Space Shuttle Main Engine) were back in operation within two weeks, although it took a little longer to get all fully operational," Ms. Jackson said. "When DCMA employees were not needed to cover contractor processes, they joined their NASA colleagues to form teams to go out and provide community service to the local area — helping to remove trees, inspecting hookups for the FEMA trailers and patching neighborhood roofs," Ms. Jackson explained. Lockheed Martin, the prime contractor, officially reopened the Michoud facility on Oct. 3. "But as early as September 10, with bridges out and access back to the city strictly controlled, some quality assurance specialists were going to the facility by helicopter and later by convoy to support the movement of the Space

Shuttle external tanks to more secure locations," according to Ms. Jackson.

Addressing the status of DCMA NASA Product Operations' employees, Ms. Jackson reported that as of Oct. 20, "Most have returned to their pre-Katrina assignments supporting our

(Above) DCMA Huntsville's Anniston Team Chief Mr. Robert Lusk inspects a damaged contractor facility in Southern Mississippi. (Photo courtesy of DCMA Huntsville Katrina Assessment Team)

(Opposite) Roof and structural damage was a common problem for many contractor facilities in DCMA Huntsville region. (Photo courtesy of DCMA Huntsville Katrina Assessment Team)

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customer. All but eight employees have been able to return to work, and most of them will be back before the end of the month. Another four are TDY [temporary duty], working at other CMOs because they do not yet have lodging in the New Orleans area. Four colleagues are requesting permanent reassignment to other CMOs because they do not wish to return to the New Orleans area.” She added that 27 have uninhabitable homes for the near future.

DCMA ATK Thiokol

One employee from an unaffected area who volunteered in post-hurricane recovery efforts was Mr. Jody Cope, a quality assurance specialist at DCMA ATK Thiokol, Brigham City, Utah. Mr. Cope, who had previously served as a Red Cross volunteer, volunteered for specialized mass-care training and was soon on the way to the Gulf Coast. The Northern Utah Chapter of the Red Cross officially recognized Mr. Cope “for stepping up in a time of need. We all know a natural disaster can strike at any time, but volunteers like Jody Cope come around once in a lifetime,” according to Ms. Hillary Hansen of the Red Cross.

Throughout both hurricanes, DCMA employees performed outstandingly. Perhaps the most telling statement came from Air Force Col. Jeffrey Brand, DCMA NASA Product Operations commander.

In a note to the author, Col. Brand stated how proud he is of his people:

The leadership demonstrated by Susan Jackson, Wayne Reynolds, John Carcamo and Herb Hostler [was] nothing short of extraordinary, especially in light of many of their own personal losses. My staff, to include Fred Stein, Doug White, Sandy Martinez and Kate Fernandez, spent many long days ensuring the safety of displaced personnel, then followed up, ensuring that safe haven orders were issued quickly. Finally, the great team members at Stennis, Michoud and Johnson Space Center were focused on helping one another, the community and the customer rather than their own issues. We need to acknowledge the terrific support Colonel Slade and her team provided. Without it, my personnel would have been left to fend for themselves. It is an honor for me to be associated with such a fine group of professionals.



DCMA Orlando Supports Katrina Recovery Effort

by Ms. Dianna Cutrer, Industrial Specialist, DCMA Orlando

When the call came in from the Carson, Calif., based Katrina Support Team for storm damage impact assessments on critical vendors and subcontractors, DCMA Orlando initiated the request for all field offices to contact each of the critical contractors and obtain status reports. With the usual tenacity of the DCMA industrial specialists, we were able to quickly make contact and provide critical information and analysis on all the impacted contractors and their delivery schedules. The Katrina Support Team was provided with daily status reports on the contractors listed on the data call, and I and others often worked evenings and weekends to gather, analyze and provide information to the Support Team. The team then passed the current information to the Department of Homeland Security and other customers involved in the decision-making processes or with programs that may have been impacted by supply-chain problems.

Sometimes hurricanes and other disasters bring out the best in people and in organizations, and this turned out to be the case with DCMA personnel in the aftermath of this destruction.